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A Village of Historical Buildings Houses One of New Jersey's Most Unique Markets

If you've driven down RT 537 Monmouth Rd., just a few miles south of Great Adventure, chances are you've wondered about that collection of rustic buildings on the side of the road. Those buildings make up the New Egypt Flea Market Village, a place where even the buildings have a rich history. Each of the 40+ buildings have their own story of a past life in another place and time.

In the late 1950's, the town of New Egypt lost their local farmers market. Esler (Les) Heller had just returned from serving in the Navy and noticed that the vendors were looking for a new market. It was then that Mr. Heller decided to use the land near his home as a new venue for livestock auctions and produce sales. Soon after opening his new market in 1959, Mr. Heller added tables for second hand and antique sales and The New Egypt Flea Market Village was alive and thriving.

In the late sixties, Mr. Heller began bringing in buildings. One by one they arrived from towns throughout central and southern New Jersey. Many of the buildings were destined for demolition, but he preserved them by bringing them into the market and giving them a new purpose. He laid them out in a village setting with dirt roads. The last of the buildings arrived in the mid 1970's and nearly all the buildings are still standing today. Among the buildings is approximately sixteen WWII era army barracks purchased from Fort Dix. Once home to soldiers, the barracks now house everything from a furniture store to a food pantry. The market has three rows, or roads. The back road has a dozen old barracks each painted a different color. Most of the barracks are section off into two independently run shops.

Another four barracks are located on the front road. Here you'll find the most icon one. Several years ago, the entire back of building 39 was painted with a patriotic American flag mural. Visible from the road, it has become one of the most iconic buildings in the village.

Next door to building 39, you'll find the oldest school house from a nearby town. A century ago, its one room taught reading, writing and arithmetic. Formerly Glen's Hut, where it spent nearly two decades housing Southwestern American treasures and other historical items. Now it's Roy's known as The Hooch.

The school's red exterior once replaced with a bright yellow has now returned to a schoolhouse red. Who chose the bright yellow and why someone would paint an old school house yellow remains a mystery. But that's the way it is here. Each shop owner adds their own touch to each building and as the years pass the unique characteristics of each one grows.

Unusual colors are typical here at the market. Towards the end of the front road stand three old officer's quarters, also purchased from Fort Dix. One is barn red, another baby blue with cedar shakes, and the third is pastel pink.

Not all the buildings have a military and educational background. The second road has more than a dozen and a half buildings with an exciting past. They came from a variety of resorts and camps that were popular decades ago. Think of the movie *Dirty Dancing*. That's the kind of resorts we're talking about. When the heyday for those resorts came to an end, Mr. Heller saved many of the cottages from destruction by bringing them to the village. Now, they're filled with antiques, collectables, refurbished furniture, and vintage items.

One of the most unusual buildings is the office. Its past life was a Dairy Queen. But now, it plays double duty as the New Egypt Flea Market Village's main office and as an antique and collectables shop run by the market's manager (Mr. Heller's son-in-law) Keith Warner.

In total, there's more than forty historical buildings in the New Egypt Flea Market Village and even more unique shops. The next time you're driving down RT 537 Monmouth Rd., stop in and take a walk through history. The market is open every Wednesday and Sunday, year-round from 8 am to 2 pm. For more info call 609-758-2082.